
MERKEL GRANTS MAY UNTIL NEW YEAR TO TRIGGER ARTICLE 50

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel gave her opposite number Theresa May breathing space to come up with a Brexit negotiation position on Wednesday (20 July), concurring with the new British PM that London will not trigger Article 50 until the New Year.

At a evening dinner in Berlin □ Mays first foreign trip since becoming prime minister seven days ago □ May stressed that she needed until the end of the year to come up with a UK position □ even if that upset some EU member states.

Merkel, at a joint press conference of the two women at the Chancellery in Berlin, agreed, but warned No one wants things to be up in the air – neither Britain nor the member states of the EU.

Technically, the UK must give legal notice under Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty of its desire to quit the 28-member bloc, following Junes shock referendum result.

However, Article 50 makes no mention of a time frame, beyond the two-years of negotiation that will then follow.

Although May became PM unexpectedly quickly, following David Camerons resignation, few member states are likely to have much patience beyond the start of 2017 □ and with it, the French and German election cycles.

Everybody has an interest that these things are prepared carefully, that the positions are clear □ and I think its fully understandable that a certain amount of time is needed for that, Merkel said.

With a UK parliament report today condemning the Cameron government for having no Brexit contingency planning, Merkel told reporters that Britain needed a well-defined position before starting the two-year talks

May admitted such a timescale pushing notification beyond the end of 2016 would not please everyone.

She said, All of us will need time to prepare for these negotiations and the United Kingdom will not invoke Article 50 until our objectives are clear. That is why I have said already that this will not happen before the end of this year.

I understand this timescale will not please everyone but I think it is important to provide clarity on

that now. We should strive for a solution which respects the decision of British voters, but also respects the interests of our European partners.

May said her priority was a sensible and orderly departure.

Although May – who herself campaigned for a Remain vote in the referendum – has repeatedly said Brexit means Brexit since entering Number 10, it has become clear that few on the Leave side agree what form of relationship, or membership of the European Economic Area, could now apply.

No praise for Boris

Under critical questioning from German reporters over the appointment of Boris Johnson as Foreign Secretary, May pointedly refused to defend him by name, merely praising the team she had appointed to deal with Brexit.

Merkel also pointed out that informal negotiations on Brexit could not take place until Article 50 is notified.

I've been clear that Brexit means Brexit and the UK is going to make a success of it, May said, but stressed that Britain was not walking away from our European friends.

It's in that constructive spirit I've come here today to lay the foundation for a strong relationship in the months and years to come, she said.

But Merkel made clear the negotiations – to be conducted on the British side by former European minister under John Major, David Davis – could get sticky.

It's not as if the British prime minister will in future sit at the EU table, Merkel said. We will certainly stick up for our interests just as Britain does for its own citizens.

The UK already announced today it was giving up its rotating presidency of the EU Council, set for the end of 2017, to Estonia.

May reiterated her promise to reduce UK immigration to a sustainable level of tens of thousands a year – although again, without putting a deadline on it.

Asked by the BBC about the UK and German both now being represented by female leaders, May joked, We have two women here who have got on and had a very constructive discussion.

Two women who, if I may say so, get on with the job.

**Photo: EU Observer*

<http://www.euractiv.com/section/uk-europe/news/merkel-grants-may-until-new-year-to-trigger-article-50/>

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